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DOROTHY RICHARDSON

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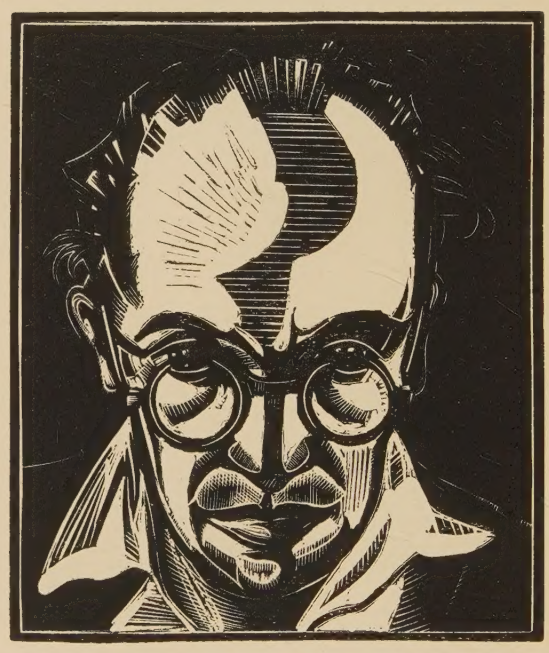
JOHN AUSTEN AND THE INSEPARABLES

BOOKS BY DOROTHY RICHARDSON

POINTED ROOFS
BACKWATER
HONEYCOMB
THE TUNNEL
INTERIM
DEADLOCK
REVOLVING LIGHTS
THE TRAP
OBERLAND



SELF PORTRAIT JOHN AUSTEN 1930

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JOHN AUSTEN AND THE INSEPARABLES

By DOROTHY RICHARDSON

WITH A FOREWORD AND
DECORATIONS BY
JOHN AUSTEN

WILLIAM JACKSON
(BOOKS) LTD.
TOOK'S COURT
LONDON
1930

FIRST PUBLISHED 1930

There is also a special edition of this book printed on hand-made paper, specially bound and signed by both Dorothy Richardson and John Austen, and limited to 125 *copies,* 100 *being for sale. In each copy of this edition is inserted an original signed engraving by John Austen.*

FOREWORD

THERE are in the old Illuminated missals many pictures of, shall we call them, the Fathers of Book Illustration. There they sit in their clean cell-studios bended over their task, or gazing, with to us moderns, far too cheerful countenances, through the window into the peace of the Abbey meadows. These self-portraits, while amusing us, bring if not a pang of envy, certainly a feeling of regret that their calm unhurried lot is denied to us, for while these old monks could and did spend their lives wandering from gilded

initial to prayer, and from prayer to bed—we rush the completion of our *n*th volume over our breakfast. It's exciting ; we certainly escape any monotony that they may have felt.

And it is no less a matter for regret, that we illustrators in this machine civilization have lost their freedom from control ; no longer do we, in our cells, have full sovereignty over our craft, but we must submit to this and that power. No longer do we weave our letters and our drawings and our bindings into one masterly pattern. We are happy, having made our drawings in record time, to be allowed to hand them over to a mysterious potentate who puts them into a machine with type and paper and plenty of ink, round go the wheels, and glory be, out hurtles a book ! ! which, if not firmly held together with glue and string would, for very shame, fly back into its embryo atoms with Bibliographic curses.

For this business of book-making is, after all, a visual art, depending on the eye alone for the just appreciation of its niceties, and no amount of typographical learning will supply that which only the artist can supply, right judgment—form.

It is not the machine that is at fault, for our mechanical methods can and do produce real books, masterpieces of great beauty, it

is the mind in control that makes or mars the result.

The typographical expert—bless him—is too much concerned with his histories and catalogues of Founts and Founders to be able to get the book into true artistic perspective, and the printer has his machines, and lives surrounded by forms and ems and printer's ink, and, anyway, his job is to print. We might, with as much reason, ask the binder to undertake the production of an illustrated volume, as to leave it in the care of either the printer—the publisher—or the typographical expert. Books are not only specimens of type or printing, or portfolios of pictures; they are, strangely enough, books for our pleasure and reading.

It is just because our forerunner, the monk in his pleasant cell, was able to control all the elements of his task, that his book still delights us, and remains even to our sophisticated eyes a thing of rare beauty.

I doubt not, that had there been a typographically minded Abbot in his Monastery, our monk's book would never have been finished. He would, perforce, have left his labours, unfrocked for his blasphemies.

It should be the artist-craftsman's job to make his own book—not with his hands—the machine will do that labour for him—but with his brain

and eye—using type, printing, binding and engraving, in his own way to serve his own idea of beauty of form. Thus only can he really work. No one else can do it as he can, for it is his job.

JOHN AUSTEN.

JESSON. 1930.

JOHN AUSTEN AND THE INSEPARABLES

WHEN a literary critic describes a work of literature in terms of any of the other arts, calls it three-dimensional, compares it to a cathedral, draws our attention to the plastic quality of its style, its admirable coloratura, and so forth, we may be sure he is doing his best to praise. But if an art-critic shall say that the work of a given artist is literary, it is usual to suppose that he has snubbed it. And the idea that literature is honoured in being compared to the other arts and they insulted by the mere suggestion of a

relationship to literature is found reflected in the phrase Art and Literature, implying not only separation but also secondariness for the one thus admitted to partnership.

And indeed there is between literature and the other arts at least one fundamental distinction that would appear to justify the popular classification. It is not only that a bird's-eye view of a nation's spiritual produce reveals its art blossoming visibly in the market-place and its literature hiding on bookshelves, but also that the material, of art and literature respectively, is approached, by those who fashion it, along such very different paths. For whereas the artist comes to his medium from afar and consciously lives through his early struggles therewith, the writer, whatever his struggles, is handling a medium he has used from infancy onwards and whose arduous acquisition and final mastery he has long since forgotten. It lies, ready for use, stored up within him in fragments each of which is a living unit complete in form and significance. Within this medium the reader also is at home. But he who will intelligently survey a cathedral, statue or picture must first learn something of the language in which it is written.

And thus it is that although the book yields its treasure not directly in a single eyeful, but extendedly in the course of a prolonged collabora-

tion between reader and writer, it remains humanity's intimate: the domestic pet among the arts. It is mobile and companionable, allowing itself to be carried in the pocket to the ends of the earth. Once born, of honest wedlock between genius and talent, it lives on in unabated

vigour not only just as long but also as numerously as man shall decree. The other arts, excepting only music, produce single objects subject to decay and at the mercy, from the moment they are born, of innumerable calamitous possibilities.

But this apparent separation and unique singleness of a " work of art " breeds strange illusions, and one of the strangest is the idea, cherished not only by the thoughtless but also by those who ought to know better, that book-illustration, or art produced in relation to any kind of text, is a secondary form of fine art. The full absurdity of this attitude—whose prize achievement during last century was its blindness to the proportions of the Parisian topical newspaper cartoonist Henri Daumier, now recognized as alternatively one of the greatest or the very greatest draughtsman of all time, and who is one of the few elected for survival, on the strength of his insistence on form, even by the ultra-moderns—becomes clear only when we reflect that the majority of masterpieces hanging in the picture galleries of Europe are frankly book-illustrations : illustrations of the Bible and what we now know as " the classics," some of which, when the paintings appeared, were pieces of contemporary literature. As was, for example, the poem of the humanist Poliziano —the immediate inspiration of a picture treasured

in innumerable reproductions and recently to be seen at Burlington House: Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*.

Art and Literature, linked in infancy in a script that was a series of pictures, have never yet

been separated. The most abstract art, moving in ghostly fashion along the pathway of "the æsthetic approach" towards the ideal of "significant form," vainly pulls its utmost to sever the link and yet, willy-nilly, must tell some kind of tale. All literature is in some degree pictorial. And the common love of the picture-book, even of that whose pictures crudely duplicate the major incidents of a text, is never solely the unholy love of seeing the villain depicted in the act of attempting the life of the hero, but also, unawares, the love of that which comes forth from the picture before its intention is grasped: æsthetic love. And, at the opposite end of the scale, those who like their literature clothed in decorations as music clothes a song so long as these stop short of concrete representation, are yet suffering the influence of graven images with eloquent tongues.

Balanced between these extremes are those of more or less catholic taste. I confess myself of their number. I like the old-fashioned picture-book, explicitly illustrated. I like the decorated book, whether its decorations be the undulating sing-song of patterns that are composed transmutations of natural objects, or the angular din of those that are mechanisms likewise transmuted and composed. And I love the stately illustrated edition, provided author and artist are worthy of

each other, and the illustrations, when such are explicit, emerge first in their own right to delight me as things of beauty, and have therefore the power of retaining, when presently they become one with the text, their quality of a finely supporting decoration.

And it is because his work has this power to an exceptional degree that John Austen is one of the very few illustrators of to-day who enhance the value of the text they illustrate. Meditating this enhancement, I am reminded of *South Wind*, whose illustrated edition is such an admirable example of happy marriage between art and literature. Perhaps Douglas alone can fully appreciate what Austen has done for his book—but it is difficult to believe that any reader who has experienced both the plain and the decorated edition will fail to emerge from the latter convinced, if he stood in need of such convincement, that the call of a book for the purple and fine linen of decorative illustration is exactly in proportion to its excellence. And perhaps it is partly because *South Wind* passed almost unnoticed and

* Since this essay went into type I have seen the newly-published *Argus Press* edition of *The Collected Tales of Pierre Louys*: a beautiful production of these strange legends whose blend of modern sophistication and full-bodied Pagan spirituality is admirably set forth in John Austen's full-page illustrations in colour and pen and ink.

the tribute paid by the *Argus Press* in setting it up in the style it deserves rouses the emotions inseparable from timely rescues, that this particular work of Austen comes first to my mind, where I find, standing in line with it, his *Madame Bovary*—wherein, as in *South Wind*, he has contrived not only to render acceptable the occasional break in visual and tactile continuity that has given the glossy " plate " its power to shock the hyper-sensitive æsthete, but so to make this interloper at home in the general decorative scheme of the book that its assertion of separate entity is imperceptible—and *Tristram Shandy* where, perhaps because in this meandering drama the eye of the onlooker is kept always upon the human form, Austen's power of characterization and his mastery of composition and figure-grouping have their fullest scope.

His truly crafty book-sense, part of his talent for making his decorative illustrations appear to have grown with the text, is the secret of his success with each of two works of literature whose treatments of a single theme differ as widely as do a mountain thunderstorm and a minuet: *Manon Lescaut*, where delicately seductive, pastelesque plates and decorations breathe, in rhythm with Prévost's passionate outpourings, the charm of frailty and the tragic frailty of charm; and *Rogues in Porcelain*, joyously con-

ceived when the artist, browsing amongst English eighteenth-century love-poems, was moved to make an anthology. The result is a miniature pageant of the Regency, a massed gaiety of colourful decoration within whose scheme—which includes both covers and endpapers and links together the fifteen full-page colour-plates, solid, welcome condensations of its prevailing spirit—the shapely little poems come and go, attaining the reader together with their surroundings in the manner of a single artistic achievement.

Side by side with his discovery and rehabilitation of these piquant little poems I would place his rescue of Disraeli's *Infernal Marriage*. For sheer joyous gusto this book is Austen's star performance and even to glance through its pages is almost to hear the author chortling in his grave. Suitably enough, it is in an earlier collaboration with Disraeli, in the decorations resuscitating the witty profanity of *Ixion in Heaven*, that he celebrates, in 1925, his final escape from the influence of Beardsley: an influence visibly waning in the work produced towards the end of his London period. The small book preceding *Ixion*—the morality plays of *Everyman*—is the interesting failure of a first attempt to stand alone.

From this date onwards there is no trace left in Austen's work—save perhaps the purity of line it served to foster—of the influence of the master

whose genius overwhelmed the young carpenter coming up to town from rural remoteness and seclusion in a Kent that in 1906 was still both rural and remote. In Beardsley's static vitality he felt his ideal fulfilled, spent arduous days and nights in imitative effort, intermittently attended life-classes, devoted the scant leisure he allowed himself to amateur theatricals, and finally, under duress, took a post on the staff of P.I.P., a penance lasting something over a year and ending with the production of R. H. Keen's *The Little Ape* illustrated in a manner that suggests Beardsley modified by a certain wistful sadness, sad wistfulness, to be found in all of Austen's earlier work, in the *Echoes from Theocritus*, in *The Condemned* and even in *Hamlet*, a quite splendid Beardsley effect, a work which gained for the artist a name, a foundation membership of the *Graphic Arts Society* (later abandoned by him owing to its prevalent spirit: reactionary pontificality finding vent in childish fury with any critic interested in modern art) and the unfailing friendship and sympathetic support of Haldane Macfall, to whom thanks are due for his share in bringing about the exhibition of Austen's work (together with that of Harry Clarke, Austin Spare, and Alan Odle) at the St. George's Gallery in 1925. It was during this early period that Austen became for a while a member of the Royal Society of British

VENUS DESOLATE ENGRAVING BY JOHN AUSTEN

Artists. Like Whistler, he was moved to leave this body.

There is perhaps nothing arbitrary in attributing the curious wistfulness to be found in Austen's London work to a quite necessary and helpful, but also devastating, displacement. He had become a townsman and was suffering an unconscious nostalgia. He had indeed with characteristic thoroughness transformed himself. To the end of his time in London he remained the perfect æsthete, precious, even in appearance, to the finger-tips; and a trifle cynical. But hidden away within him was the Kentish Man, or the Man of Kent—for to one or other of these rival fraternities he must inevitably belong—raising the conflict that doubtless helped to produce the illness that finally engineered his escape. It was to Kent that he returned and there he now lives and works and only those who knew the John of London will discover any trace of the long-haired studio exquisite in the restored John of Kent, the bronzed, athletic swimmer who plants his own garden and runs his own car and can, at need, run his own kitchen; who knows every stock and stone of the sea-girt, weald-girt Marsh, and owns every field, and every beast therein, as his good friend. And though he has not ceased to be a bookman it is not any more either to *Don Juan* or to *Daphnis and Chloe* that

he will turn—though his work on both these books has the joyous vigour and freedom that heralded his escape from under the twin magics of London and of Beardsley. And he may, I fear, do no more pictures for fairy tales such as he did for those of Perrault, which should have been mentioned for the happiness with which they strike the child's note of vivid colour and grave realistic fantasy. But I am not surprised to learn that the *Limited Editions Club* of New York has chosen him to illustrate *Vanity Fair*, nor that he has recently returned to Shakespeare and is about to publish an *As You Like It*. Thinking of *South Wind*, of *Bovary*, and of *The Infernal Marriage*, I await this work, which in his own judgment is the best he has so far done, with eager expectation.

DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON.

A HAND-LIST OF BOOKS ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN AUSTEN

(They are not necessarily in order of publication)

THE LITTLE APE AND OTHER STORIES. By R. H. Keen. (Henderson. 1921.)

SONGS FOR MUSIC AND LYRICAL POEMS. By Eleanor Farjeon. (Selwyn & Blount. 1922.)

PERFECTION. Translated from the Portuguese by Charles Marriott. (Selwyn & Blount. 1923.) Also E.D.L. of 250 copies signed by Artist.

THE ADVENTURES OF HARLEQUIN. By Francis Bickley. (Selwyn & Blount. 1923.) Also E.D.L. of 250 copies signed by Artist.

ECHOES FROM THEOCRITUS. By Edward Cracroft Lefroy. (Selwyn & Blount. 1922.)

PERRAULT'S TALES OF PAST TIMES. (Selwyn & Blount. 1922.) Also an E.D.L. of 200 copies signed by the Artist.

ROGUES IN PORCELAIN. Compiled by John Austen. (Chapman & Hall. 1924.)

THE FIVE BLACK COUSINS AND OTHER BIRD RHYMES. By J. Murray Allison. With Foreword by J. C. Squire. (Jonathan Cape. 1924.)

THE WITCHES' BREW. By E. J. Pratt. (Selwyn & Blount. 1925.)

EVERYMAN AND OTHER PLAYS. (Chapman & Hall. 1925.)

DAPHNIS AND CHLOE. Translated out of the Greek by George Thornley in 1657. (Geoffrey Bles. 1925.)

Also small E.D.L. of 100 copies signed by the Artist, with separate portfolio of additional plates.

MANON LESCAUT. By L'Abbé Prévost. With an Introduction by J. Lewis May. (Geoffrey Bles. 1928.)

DON JUAN. By Lord Byron. (John Lane. 1926.)

THE GODS ARE ATHIRST. By Anatole France. (John Lane. 1926.)

MADAME BOVARY. By Gustave Flaubert. Translated, with an Introduction by J. Lewis May. (John Lane. 1928.)

MOLL FLANDERS. By Daniel Defoe. With an Introduction by W. H. Davies. (John Lane. 1929.)

THE INFERNAL MARRIAGE. By Benjamin Disraeli. With an Introduction by Eric Partridge. (William Jackson (Books) Ltd. 1929.) Also an E.D.L. of 200 copies signed by the Artist.

THE BEST POEMS OF 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928 and 1929. (Five books.) (Jonathan Cape.)

HAMLET. By William Shakespeare. (Selwyn & Blount. 1922.) Also E.D.L. of 50 copies signed by the Artist.

IXION IN HEAVEN. By Benjamin Disraeli. (Jonathan Cape. 1925.)

THE CONDEMNED. By Hugh I'Anson Fausset. (Selwyn & Blount. 1922.)

TRISTRAM SHANDY. By Laurence Sterne. Introduction by J. B. Priestley. (John Lane. 1928.)

SOUTH WIND. By Norman Douglas. 2 vols. (Argus Book Shop. 1929.)

THE COLLECTED TALES OF PIERRE LOUYS. Limited to 2,000 copies. (Argus Book Shop. 1929.)

JOHN AUSTEN AND THE INSEPARABLES. By Dorothy Richardson. A Critical study of John Austen as a Book-illustrator. (William Jackson (Books) Ltd. 1930.)

In Active Preparation

AS YOU LIKE IT. By William Shakespeare. With Introduction and modern stage directions arranged by G. B. Harrison. (William Jackson (Books) Ltd. 1930.) Also an E.D.L. of 115 copies numbered and signed by the Artist.

VANITY FAIR. By W. M. Thackeray. (Limited Editions Club. New York.) For Subscribers only.

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